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CELEBRATION, BY THE WOODFORD COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY, OF THE SEVEN-
TIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
FORMATION OF WOODFORD
COUNTY, ILLINOIS.

Woodford county was formed Feb. 27, 1841. Our local historical society on deciding to celebrate the seventieth anniversary of this event, asked the Board of Supervisors for an appropriation of fifty dollars with which to carry out our plans for the celebration and other work the society has under contemplation. The board willingly made this appropriation. We then advertised the meeting in all the newspapers of the county and neighboring towns, requesting those living, who were residents of the territory when the county was formed, to send their names to the secretary, and also to give any items of interest they remember relating to the early history of the county. Ninety-six names were handed in, the oldest person being one hundred and two years old. The list of names was published twice before the celebration. Much to our pleasure there are more of the "charter members" of the county living than we anticipated. Doubtless there are others whom we have not reached.

February 27 was a beautiful day. A large and interested audience gathered in the Presbyterian church to help celebrate the seventieth birthday of the county. Thirty-three of the settlers of 1841 were present. Quite a number came from a distance. It was home coming to them. After enjoying a short reception in the auditorium of the church they gathered in front of the court house

where a picture was taken of them in a group. Reassembling in the church the rest of the program was given. The invocation was pronounced by Rev. D. W. McMillin of the Presbyterian church. Excellent music was furnished by Miss Ada Holbrook, Austin Kershaw and the Eureka College Quartet— Messrs. Reichel, McGuire, Higdon and Carr.

Prof. B. J. Radford of Eureka, gave an address on "The Beginnings of Woodford County." The Professor was a mere boy when the county was formed, yet he remembers the stirring events incident to the steps taken for the formation of the county. He knew the men who took the leading part in securing names on the petition asking the legislature that the territory be formed into a county, the party who went on horseback to Springfield to place the petition before the legislature and the men who signed the petition. He stated that at the time the county was formed considerable territory now in the county was taken from McLean and Tazewell counties. Large areas of it were uninhabited. Government land could be bought for \$1.25 per acre, now worth \$250 per acre. He traced the growth and development of the county and recounted the movements leading to the formation of the county; the location of the seat of justice at Versailles; the removal of the county seat from there to Hanover, now Metamora; and later to Eureka. A considerable portion of his address was devoted to social conditions and general government. According to the census of 1850 the population of the county was 4,415. By the census of 1880, 1890 and 1900 the population was little more than 21,000. In 1910 it fell to 20,506. The settlers of Woodford county were of a high type of citizenship. They early devoted themselves to the development of their spiritual and intellectual natures by the location of churches and school houses in their midst.

Hon. J. A. Ranney of Cazenovia, gave an address on "The Early Settlers of Woodford County." It was a

masterly address. Mr. Ranney was interested in his subject. The audience was in sympathy with the speaker. He was one of the early settlers and grew eloquent in describing the simple life of early times. The settlers came from New York, New England, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Kentucky. The philosophical Dutchman was here, the wide awake Irishman, who is always present where there is anything good, the F. F. Vs from Virginia. They came from everywhere. Brought up under different conditions they possessed dispositions peculiar to themselves. They mingled and became neighbors, living in peace and harmony and were Americans in the true sense. It took courage those days to leave home, friends and ties, traveling on horseback or in a covered wagon, the trip requiring six months, to make a home in this wild western country, never expecting to see their home people again. These people were masters of the situation. They made homes, though the log cabin was the rule. It was home. The good house-wife spun, wove, cut out, made clothing for the family and cared for her home. She was queen, and there was happiness and contentment in the one-roomed log house with the mud and brick fireplace for both cooking and heating purposes. This one room was given up for school at times. We of to-day do not know how it was done, but our heroic mothers did it. Churches too were built to purify their homes. Schools were built to make their homes intelligent. They did not grab for all the territory in reach, but were satisfied

“To make a happy fire-side chime
To wean and wife,
That’s true pathos and sublime
Of human life.”

Abraham Lincoln was given as a type of the pioneers of Woodford county. They did what was at hand to do, and they did it in a brave, masterful way, not to get their

names in the paper, but that it was the doing of things that produced results, homes, settlements, county and state. We are to-day enjoying the fruits of the labors of our fathers and grandfathers, the sturdy pioneers of Woodford county.

Mrs. Jessie Palmer Weber, Secretary of the State Historical Society, Springfield, by her presence and address added interest to the celebration. She spoke of the good work the State Historical Society is doing and the help it is giving the local historical societies. Its publications are full of interesting matter relating to the early history of the State. Copies are sent to all the local societies. Encouragement was given to the Woodford County Historical Society. Mrs. Weber then gave an instructive address on "The Beginning of Illinois."

After a few minutes intermission Mrs. Rowland Evans, of Bloomington, Illinois, gave briefly some recollections of her early life in Woodford county. Her father, S. S. Park, was the first surveyor of the county. In appropriate remarks she presented to the society her father's commission signed by the Governor. Mrs. Evans also presented to the society an old deed to a quarter section of land in Woodford county, made in 1846; consideration \$250, now worth \$250 per acre. Mrs. Evans thought that the Woodford County Historical Society was entitled to these historical documents.

Many of the early settlers had sent greetings to the society with regrets that advanced age would not permit them to make so long a journey to attend the celebration. Three letters of considerable length and full of early history of the territory and county were read, one from Aaron A. Richardson, Wellington, Kansas, another from Mrs. Jennie Mitchell Bullock, Cleveland, Ohio, and another one from J. J. Davenport, Sturgis, South Dakota. All these letters expressed deep regret that the writers could not be present to enjoy the celebration and see the faces of those whom they have not seen for forty, sixty,

and in some cases seventy years. We keenly felt this disappointment for them.

The meeting was a grand success. In the words of some of these old people: "It is growing better each year." Several have asked: "Why we can not have another celebration soon?"

After a brief prayer Prof. B. J. Radford dismissed the audience.

L. J. FREESE,

Eureka, Ill., March 20, 1911.